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Duarte says Salvadoran democracy is growing

From combined dispatches

Former El Salvadoran President Jose Napoleon Duarte said yesterday that the right in his country is joining the democratic process in increasing numbers, and he hopes the left will do the same once an elected president assumes office next spring.

But he held out little hope that representatives of leftist guerrillas will take part in the March elections.

Mr. Duarte, the Christian Democratic candidate for president, said that, if elected, he will try to provide a secure atmosphere that will permit representatives of all political persuasions to join the democratic process.

Mr. Duarte, who spoke at a news conference, is here on a private visit but is having meetings with members of Congress and officials of the State and Defense departments, the National Security Council and the CIA.

He served as interim president of El Salvador for a year and a half until the Constituent Assembly selected Alvaro Magana as provisional president in April 1982.

He suggested that an elected president will have far greater authority to act than Mr. Magana has.

If elected, Mr. Duarte said, he will place high priority on controlling violence and "giving security not only to the left but to all the people in the country . . . so that everybody can express their opinions."

Mr. Duarte's main rival in March is expected to be Roberto d'Aubuisson, the Constituent Assembly president who also is head of the most powerful conservative party, ARENA.

In San Salvador, meanwhile, the assembly has voted 34-25 in favor of a constitutional article on land reform written by ARENA, which sets a limit on land ownership of 613 acres.

The Christian Democrats, opposed to the measure, had backed a plan setting limits of 250 acres on arable land and 375 acres on less-productive land.

Critics say the law will block any major new programs to provide farms to peasants and will allow families to divide property among themselves instead of offering it to landless peasants.